

Australia joins push for open access to particle physics

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Australia has joined SCOAP3, an international consortium that aims to provide free access to major particle physics journals world-wide. Six of the Group of Eight universities in Australia have agreed to participate in the consortium: Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Western Australia, New South Wales and the Australian National University.

The Australian partnership will be coordinated by the University of Melbourne.

"Australian universities have a long history of collaboration to provide the advanced scholarly information infrastructure required to support research and innovation," said Melbourne's Vice-Principal (Information) and CIO, Linda O'Brien.

"Now, more than perhaps ever before, collaboration across national and international boundaries will be essential to advance knowledge creation and dissemination.

SCOAP3 provides an excellent opportunity to test how this may be done. It is a bold and exciting initiative."

SCOAP3 members are high-energy physics funding agencies and laboratories, leading national and international libraries and library consortiums. They represent the USA, 12 countries in Europe and the multinational European Organisation for Nuclear Research (CERN) -- and, now, Australia.

With the accession of Australia, SCOAP3 has received pledges for one-third of its budget. Once it is fully subscribed, SCOAP3 will make a tender offer to the current publishers of high-energy physics journals.

The publishers would be guaranteed operating money to cover the cost of editorial work. In return, the publishers would make the journals freely available to the entire world.

With increasingly powerful IT and communication technologies, the pace of discovery in high-energy physics has increased immensely.

Communication among researchers occurs mainly through arXiv.org, an Open Access repository of working papers and pre-print versions of articles. With arXiv, researchers can learn about new discoveries within 24 hours.

However, the top refereed journals remain essential to the scholarly communication process. The peer-review process helps to ensure the quality of published scholarly work. A small number of the journals are used in measuring research performance.

The SCOAP3 partners hope to ensure that the top peer-reviewed journals maintain their integrity while remaining financially viable.

"Most high-energy physics articles are published in just six peer-reviewed journals. At present, university libraries subscribe to these journals and make them available to researchers and students," said Ms O'Brien.

"Instead of paying for subscriptions, each SCOAP3 partner will redirect that money to supporting Open Access publishing of the key high-energy physics journals.

"If successful, the model could be applied to other disciplines."

Each SCOAP3 member country will contribute according to its share of high-energy physics publishing.

Allowances are made for developing countries that are unable to pay their share.

Australia produces 0.6 per cent of high-energy physics articles, an amount that will be covered by the contributions of the six participating universities.

The USA produces 24.3 per cent of HEP articles, Germany 9.1 per cent, Japan 7.1 per cent, UK 6.6 per cent, China 5.6 per cent and CERN 2.1 per cent.

SCOAP3 members include: CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, Swedish National Library, Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, several German institutions including the Deutsches Elektronen Synchrotron and the Max Planck Society, University of California, Fermilab, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Johns Hopkins University, California Institute of Technology (CalTech)

Source: University of Melbourne

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